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Women Around the World: What Are Their Options?

This issue was born a few years ago when the Committee on Women's Concerns began to study and try to understand the complexities of the abortion question. We felt that, as part of an international organization, it behooved us to look at the issue more widely than through North American eyes and experiences. In this we were breaking ground within MCC. When, for example, the then international Peace Section studied abortion in the early 80s, an overseas administrator asked them if they had taken the experiences and perspectives of women from developing countries into account. The answer was short: "No, we haven't."

The CWC also felt that to talk about abortion we had to talk about women. We did not deem it possible or desirable to isolate abortion as an "issue," cut off from the matrix of childbearing and women's status. In developing countries particularly a woman's prime task in life is still seen as childbearing and family maintenance. Her whole life revolves around this pivotal center. Is it thus legitimate to view abortion apart from the constellation of other factors that affect women in their roles as mothers and wives?

So when the CWC set out to learn about abortion in developing countries, we asked: Who cares for the children? Who provides economic support? Is family planning available? Are women free to use it? How does a community or society support a family in raising children? How does women's status enter into the issue?

We looked for the answers in women's stories, stories collected in 1987 by MCCers in diverse settings. After gathering the stories, the CWC did not attempt to draw conclusions or to make a statement about abortion. We recognized abortion as a sensitive ethical issue upon which even we did not all agree. Instead we hoped to widen the discussion by learning about women's situations in overseas settings where MCCers work.

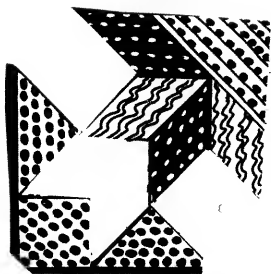
I was asked to present some of these stories and interpret them for Report readers. At times the task seemed beyond me. However, drawing upon my experiences in Jamaica and now Mexico and upon reading done, I have attempted to preface each story with an introduction that provides at least some context.

I selected only five of the many stories received, attempting to provide geographic and thematic balance. I regret there are no Asian stories.

Four of the five stories were written or narrated in English. I decided to stay as close as possible to the English used by the storyteller. Although the language may seem awkward to some readers, my hope is that it better imparts the flavor of these women's unique personalities and circumstances. Where the meaning may be unclear, parenthetical explanations have been added. It should also be noted that the names of people, as well as of most towns and cities, have been changed.

Compiling this issue reminded me that the state of women and children worldwide is grave. We are privileged women. Let us learn about our sisters in other places "so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (2 Corinthians)
—Emily Will

Emily Will, her husband Mark, and their sons Peter and Jason, do community development work with MCC in Mexico. They are members of Pilgrims Mennonite Church in Lancaster County, Pa. Emily served previously as women's concerns coordinator from 1984 to 1988.



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Healing the Hurts

This story is excerpted from a lengthy taped interview of a Jamaican woman by MCC worker Viola P. Stahl.

I first saw the interview in written form. It appeared exceedingly bleak. I returned to the tape and after listening to it, my impressions changed. Andrea's strength, great resilience and good humor reverberate throughout the tape. The bleakest parts of her story are punctuated by deep laughter. Andrea is able to look back upon the tragedies of her life with a sense of irony and, especially, gratitude to God. Her struggles have most assuredly filled her cup with compassion, of much use in church ministry.

Andrea's story is difficult to understand without knowing something about male-female relationships in the Caribbean culture. In the Caribbean, Western concepts of morality, marriage and family, based in monogamy and patriarchy, coexist with patterns of African matriarchy and East Indian extended families. (Ellis, ed., p. 7)

Another important factor is that many women are the major income-earners for their family.

Despite this or because of it,

"...attitudes to male-female relationships...are ambivalent and contradictory. On the one hand girls are taught from an early age strategies to ensure their survival and that of their families whether a male is present or not. This creates a sense of independence—hence the image of the strong Caribbean women who can cope with anything. At the same time they are also taught that it is not only desirable, but important, to have a male partner; that in the male-female relationship the man is dominant and that the woman...must defer to her male."

Young men receive similarly contradictory messages. By and large boys are not socialized and taught survival skills and strategies in the way that girls are. In the absence of this they depend very heavily on their mothers, other female relatives and later on their wives and partners. However, because they too have internalized the ideology of male dominance, deep down they resent their dependence on their strong female counterparts.

These feelings of resentment are often carried over into their adult relationships and can lead to tension and hostility as Caribbean men and women play out their conflicting roles and expectations of each other. Children see their strong dominant mothers experiencing oppression and showing insecurity as they relate to their male partners and this cycle continues and repeats itself in the next generation. (Ellis, p.8)

By and large Caribbean men are absent from or marginal to family life. Many men are involved in what Shorey-Bryan (in Ellis, p. 70) terms "visiting relationships" with several women, all of whom expect some financial support from him.

"The absence of men," Shorey-Bryan states, "may be attributed to unstable economic conditions in the Caribbean which force men to leave their families when they cannot fulfill the traditional role of provider."

Shorey-Bryan goes on to explain that men try to bolster their egos by asserting their dominance over women and children, either through physical or emotional violence. Crimes of violence against women—rape, incest, assault, sexual harassment—are prevalent throughout the Caribbean.

In this difficult climate, Caribbean women have developed support networks among female relatives—aunts, grannies, sisters—to help provide the economic and emotional support needed to raise children.

Andrea's story reminds us that in an urban culture of poverty, regardless of geographic region, survival is key. Andrea's attempt to earn money for school and personal needs via a boyfriend is not unusual. A banner headline in the Nov. 25, 1985 Daily Gleaner (a Jamaican newspaper) cries out, "Hard Times Force Young Girls to Seek Male Support." The article states that in exchange for sexual services, as many as 50 percent of Jamaican schoolgirls have men, sometimes their own fathers, supporting them.

Mary Soule, former MCC Burkina Faso worker, writes about urban women there: "In a male-dominated society, a woman often has nothing to offer but her body, and men are only too willing to sleep with women in exchange for some trinkets. City, working men have money and, reluctant to marry early, they 'play the field,' leaving a string of abortions and illegitimate children in their path. Many women do not want to be poor and ill-fed and if they can use their bodies to escape their situation, they will. What are their alternatives?"

Andrea's story also highlights how problematic it is for a child to give birth to a child. By her own admission, she was more concerned about her own welfare at age 15 than about the baby's. Also remarkable about her story, however, is that despite her rough childhood, Andrea was able to make decisions with her child's best interests in mind.

Andrea Speaks

I'm Andrea Herris. I was born in Jamaica, West Indies, and I'm now 33 years old. I was from a family of 10. My mother was born in Guatemala and she met my father there. She came to Jamaica to live.

I went to a primary school and growing up was a nice time. We generally go to the rivers to bathe on Saturdays, but we usually have a hard life because we had to go and look for wood for us to cook and we had to go to the river to do our washing and we had to carry water from a stand pipe.

I was the seventh child in the family. At the age of 6 I went to live with my aunt. She was very strict. At times I cried to go back with my mother. I don't remember what I did one time and she threatened to beat me. My mother was living about two miles away, so I left her that night and went home to my mother.

But when my mother heard the story, she sent me back, all through the night alone. It was terrible. But it seems that my mother was afraid of my aunt, because she was the biggest (eldest) one. My grandmother died early and my mother was grown (raised) by my aunt, so she had that fear for her.

When I was about 9, my aunt went to live in Kingston. She sent for me after she was settled and I went to a junior secondary school there. My aunt was not very understanding; she was rough and unsympathetic.

Whenever I did anything wrong, she would say, "I'm going to send you home to your mother."

I would be so glad every time she said that. But she never did send me back.

I didn't do well in school. I could do better but because my aunt did not have a good income, I couldn't get enough books. In those days it was terrible to come to school without books. I felt embarrassed, so I wouldn't go to school.

I didn't finish ninth grade. I got pregnant there about then because my aunt didn't have money. When I needed things, simple little things like sanitary pads, she couldn't afford to give me those things. So I had to go out to look (obtain) those things and in this way I got pregnant.

He was four years older than me. We were tenants in his father's yard; we rent a room from his father. He and I got talking. He had been in high school and he talking to me, I felt that I'm somebody, and we started seeing each other.

Then I got pregnant. The first thing he said was, "Don't call my name." I didn't know what to do. I stopped going to school. I even thought about killing myself.



Then my aunt found out. She went to the boy's parents and told them that I was pregnant. The boy's father said, "No, no, nothing like that." And he told my aunt to take

“...so that we can comfort those in any trouble with
the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”
—II Corinthians 1:4b



her “whoring girl” out of his yard. That hurt me so bad; for 13 years I had that in mind.

My aunt said, “Lord, I pray that the child come to dead stamp of the father.” That mean that the child come resembling the father. But the child came resembling the grandfather so much. (Here, Andrea laughs heartily. The man who called her a whore now has a grandchild who resembles him greatly.)

Being pregnant at 15 was very traumatic. I would be ashamed; I wouldn’t go out, I’d just stay in the house except for check-ups at the clinic.

When the time of my delivery came, my aunt chartered a car and took me down to the hospital. I was sick and I had fits (eclampsia). I didn’t really know when the baby was born because I was blocked out. When I recovered I said, “Oh, oh, my tummy’s so flat.” And the lady in the next bed said, “You had a baby last night.”

After nine days I left the hospital. My baby-father (that is, the father of her baby) wouldn’t give me anything for the child. We didn’t see each other any more. When the baby was about 5 months, my aunt and I fell out because she beat me very badly. I was all black and blue and I said I couldn’t go through anymore of this treatment.

The morning she beat me she said, “Don’t let me come back in here and see you this evening. You can leave the child, but you make sure you go.”

And I did go. Maybe I was thinking of the treatment more than how I was thinking of the child. Because it wasn’t easy living with her. But she really took care of the child. I don’t have any bad name to give her in that area. Because I had a bigger brother that was living with her at the time. And he couldn’t beat the child; she wouldn’t let no one touch the child.

I was living with some friends. Although I was a sinner, I couldn’t come up to the kind of life they were living. Every night they would go out with a different man. I didn’t like it. I said, “If it’s one man you’re talking to, just talk to one man. Not every night a different one and a different one.” So we got into a fight.

I left and went to live with my second baby-father (the man who would become the father of her second baby. She had met him at the home of a woman for whom she worked off and on.) He had an apartment; it was in the same building as his mother’s.

This man was boastful; he make out to be more than what he really is. I joined him because I didn’t have anywhere to go. But he was like this; if I’m working, he doesn’t work. He was the only child for his mother. He knew that he has his mother to give him things, so he didn’t put the effort out to work.

After about two years, I got pregnant. Being pregnant, he’s not working, it was awful. He didn’t give me any money to buy any baby clothes, nothing.

When the time came I went to the hospital to deliver. I didn’t stay very long because I wasn’t sick. The bus fare at that time was 15 cents and I only had 10 cents. So I asked around in the ward and I got 5 cents. When you go to the hospital you have to take a wash-up basin so when I was coming out I put the baby in the basin. And I put my bag over my shoulder and I took a bus and I went home. I didn’t wait for anybody because I know that nobody was going to come for me. The baby was three days old.

Shortly after having the baby—I was 20 years old—I became a Christian. My baby-father wanted me to marry him. I told him no because I see that he doesn’t like to work. All the pressure would be on me.

Then he told me to get out... His mother’s husband’s aunt had just died so there was a vacant room so I ask him to rent me the room because I didn’t know where to go.

The child was seven weeks old when I went out to work to support the child. I left the child with a lady that lived on the street. They called her Granny.

I was doing housekeeping. I reached work about seven and I wouldn’t get back until about six in the evening, because it was a big family.

I got saved in ‘76 and shortly after, I leaved the work because I couldn’t get to go to church.

A friend was going away and she asked if I couldn’t stay in the house, to look after the house for them. So I told them yes. And I went to live there, but it was a very bad year in Kingston.

The political riot had started in Kingston. So my baby’s grandmother, one day when I was gone to work, his grandmother moved the furniture to another parish. And they took the baby along with them, because Kingston was getting too hot, politically.

• The MCC Committee on Women's Concerns is looking for a replacement for Irene Loewen of Fresno, Calif. who has served on the committee since 1983. The three year position is open to a Mennonite Brethren woman from the United States. We are particularly interested in a woman who currently lives in the west. For more information contact Christine Wenger Nofisnger, MCC, Box 500, Akron, PA., 17501-0500.

She didn't tell me she was going to do this. Somebody in the street that was still there told me that they moved because of the political riot.

I got to Granny's house that night and my baby wasn't there. It was heart-rending because I had more association with this child than the first one. The child was about a year. But I said that if you were living in Kingston then you realize that it would be better for the child to go.

My aunt, the one who was taking care of my first child, died in September 1979. So I said OK, I would move up to the area where my aunt was living and take the child and see if we could make life. I took my son because everybody was saying, "Don't give him to his father. Because his father didn't support him and your aunt wouldn't want you to give him to his father." So I tried with him.

He was 10. He knew me, but not very close. We lived for only about three months together and he said he didn't want to live with me. So I said, "Do you want to live with your grandparents then?" That was his father's parents, because his father has gone abroad now.

So I went to his grandfather, although I had him in my heart. (That is, she had not forgiven him for his remark of her as a "whoring girl" when she was 15.) They had moved to a different part of Kingston. I went there and told them Dwayne wanted to come and live with them. For me alone I didn't want to bring him, but I wanted him to have a say in his life. I know if when we were children if we had a say in our lives, maybe our lives would be better. If my mother had left me stay with her, I could have had a happier childhood.

So they said they would take him and I took him to them. Until now I don't have much contact with him.

Later that year, a pharmacist friend, Carl, asked me if I wanted to come stay with them. His wife was expecting a baby and they asked me to come and look after the baby for them.

Seeing that I didn't have Dwayne to worry about at that time and I wasn't working, I packed up my furniture. And I haven't regretted coming here. It's better than the struggles that there were in Kingston. Life is a little easier.

I came to work for Carl. But then he decided to migrate. In 1981 he migrated. I was living with his mother and his mother-in-law. Then in 1982 she bought a house. There

was no space in it for me. And I said, "Lord, what is this? Will I have to sleep in the market?"

So I went to live with different friends. I would only stay with each one about a week. I didn't want them to get tired of me. I had a duffel bag and a traveling bag. And I said, "Lord, I can't take this no longer. I need a husband."

(A few years later, when she was 29, Andrea did find a husband, a Mennonite pastor. He had invited her to a youth fellowship. At first she was not attracted to him "because I was looking for somebody younger, good looking and fancy. At that time he was not really fancy. He was living by himself and he didn't have anybody to take care of himself and to let him look proper." She also found him overly serious. However, she soon was attracted to his solid qualities and they married.)

If I had married a younger person, I wouldn't get the love and understanding that I get from Michael. Michael is very understanding and very caring. When I'm sick he's the first one to take care of me.

Now we have Veronica. I prayed for Veronica; this is the child I wanted. I said, "Lord I have two other children and I don't have much in their bringing up but I'm asking you for one more, that I may give that love and understanding and caring that the other two didn't get." So I'm trying my best with this one.

I don't think much about my past. The only time I think about it is when I think of God's goodness in my life. I just have to praise God for where God has taken me from and how the Lord has healed all the hurts. With a past like this, I just have to praise God. ●



Role Juggling

This story is exceptional because the storyteller offers analysis and insight into her situation and that of her countrywomen. She works with women's development concerns for a church agency. Former MCCer Mary Tanney interviewed her.

Because her African homeland is torn by civil war, Elizabeth's pain is compounded many times. Suffering has hit closely. Elizabeth's husband was detained for several months, and her visits with him were greatly restricted. "Although that was a very difficult time for me, it was a time of grace for us," Elizabeth says, acknowledging improved communication between the couple during that trying period.

Elizabeth's story demonstrates that the increasingly difficult economic situation of the Third World is forcing changes in roles. In some cases, men migrate to look for work, leaving women as heads of households.

In homes where men are present, more women must help earn income. It is difficult to conclude whether this has helped or hurt women's status. On one hand, women are often doomed to the most menial and ill-paid of jobs. On the other hand, being in the workplace exposes women to outside ideas. They may gain independence and self-assurance.

Some argue that when women earn money they gain decision-making power within the family. Elizabeth's story refutes this idea. Here in small town Mexico men rule even when women help support the family. Sometimes he even hinders her efforts to "bring home the beans." A friend, Antonia, for example, sells Avon products despite her husband's stiff opposition. "But it's me who sees to it that the children are fed," Antonia says. Her husband's alcoholism means an unreliable income.

While women's roles outside the home are expanding, it seems that men's roles inside the home are not. Elizabeth relates the pressures felt by all when she attempted to have her sons help with household chores.

Many women worldwide move in larger family circles than we do in North America. Living in an extended family has its pros and cons. While it can provide greater economic security, Elizabeth's story points out it can also mean a great deal of economic stress on the income-earner, as well as stronger social pressures to conform to the status quo.

Compared to North American single mothers, Mexican single mothers seem to have many advantages. A widowed neighbor has five children ages 6 to 12. She lives with her parents, who provide childcare and prepare meals while she works as a secretary. A single aunt, who cleans the house, lives with them.

Elizabeth had a difficult childhood. Her parents were divorced and she was sent to a boarding school at age 5. Because her father didn't want the children to even see their mother, they could not visit their hometown during vacations.

"We used to stay with the orphans. Thus we used to feel more bitter because in fact we were not orphans. We are not orphans," she says.

Later her father remarried and Elizabeth and her siblings were permitted to spend time at home. However, she had many problems with her stepmother. As she grew older, Elizabeth realized she had few options for escaping. By her culture's tradition, a young woman may not live on her own, or with an elder married sister or with a divorced, remarried mother. Marriage is her only option.

Elizabeth Speaks

The only choice for me was to get married and leave the family. Anyway, when my husband came and proposed, I didn't hesitate because I thought that was my chance to leave the family. In fact we didn't know each other for a long time. Paul came to my town in November 1973 and by March 1974, we got married.

Before marriage I worked for about six months. But when I got married I said, "Well, let me be a housewife and please my husband and my in-laws." But while I was not working I found it difficult for us to depend on just one salary. And

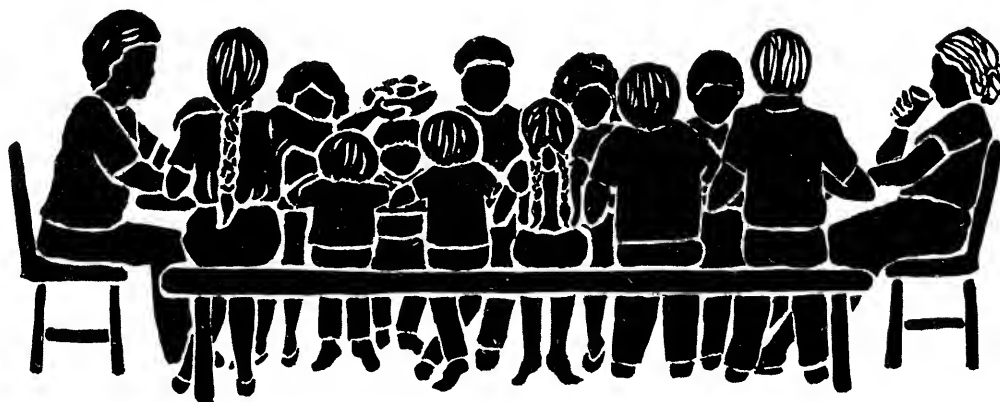
my husband comes from a big family. His grandfather had about ten wives, and so he has about 47 sons and only 50 daughters. So my father-in-law is one of his sons, who also got married to about three wives.

In our extended family, the most highly educated person is myself and so the people come to us whether they want (medical) treatments, or the children want to go to school and all those kinds of things.

Since the time we've gotten married, even before having children, we used to house not less than 25 people. With our meager income, it was very difficult. Before we married my mother gave me some gifts of gold bracelets. I started selling them when we ran short, because the salary couldn't take us to the end of the month.

thing. I just can't ask them to wash a dish for they'll say, "We are not women." I don't think that it has to be done by women. When I force them, they cry. So the same story is repeating itself, which is a pity.

Since I've got married, I've developed rheumatoid arthritis. Even my right hand is deformed and had to be operated. After having my four children, the doctor advised me to stop. My husband wants more children, and that has been a problem in the family. And of course my husband's relatives are also pushing hard that we must have more children, or advise my husband to remarry again in order to have many children. But our children are well, although we don't have much to feed them. To have too many of them is a worry.



That is what pushed me to work. I started working again when my son was about 10 months old. In fact, in my country it is not easy for a woman to work. She has to do the work in the office and then come back to the house and do all the household work.

I remember even when I was pregnant, my husband would pick me up from work. He would sit down and ask me to give him water. I'd do that, then go to the kitchen and every child would come running. It is very difficult for us to change our man.

Now I have problems with my children, even my sons, because I want to bring them up my own way. I want them to help, so that they become responsible people and don't act the same as their father. But with the extended family, so many people in the house, they say, "No, a man should not enter the kitchen." I've found my sons saying the same

So I'm still struggling. There was a time when my husband almost got married. He approached a certain girl, but the girl refused. I have been thinking about that. How will our lives be if he married another lady? Of course we would share the same house, and the feeling of even sharing the same husband. And think about our meager resources, how we can divide them, since we are already feeding about 20 people or more in the house. My husband has told me he has dropped the idea, but I don't think he was serious.

The doctor advised me to make a tubal ligation, but I can't do that without my husband's acceptance. But he doesn't want me to do it because he still hopes we'll have more children. And my fear is if I do it behind his back, then that is going to be a key for him to say, "Okay, now the woman is not bearing children anymore, so let me marry another one."

• Women in Ministry

- *Pauline Kennel* completed her work as coordinator for the Chicago Area Mennonites in the summer.
- *Janeen Bertsche Johnson*, Wichita, Kan., was licensed by the Western District Conference as associate pastor at Lorraine Avenue Church, Wichita.
- *Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus* of Harrisonburg, Va., received the sixth annual "distinguished service award" from the Alumni Association of Eastern Mennonite College. The award honors an alumnus who has given many years of significant service to the church, college and community. She became the first woman in Virginia Mennonite Conference to be ordained—on Sept. 10, 1989 at

age 74—in recognition of her ministry in the wider Mennonite Church and at the Shalom Mennonite Congregation, Harrisonburg, Va.

- *Rebecca Slough*, Berkeley, Calif., has been named managing editor of the Cooperative Hymnal Project.
- *Margaret Devadson*, Calcutta, India, visited MCC offices in Akron, Pa. She has worked

with MCC for 25 years, beginning as secretary to the country representative. Since 1975 she has been business manager.

- *Lois Habegger*, North Newton, Kan., is the interim pastor at Goessel (Kan.) Church.
- *Dorothea Janzen* has been named campus co-minister at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan.

My situation is the same for many women of my country, especially those from my tribes. Women have no say, or they are told not to say anything even when their husbands marry many wives. Here children are considered as the man's, so if you complain and leave, the children always remain with the father.

So for me, even if marriage happens, the decision to leave the family or my house won't be simple. Being a victim of divorce, I don't think I'd like that for my children. I'd rather choose to stay in the same house: not share the room with my husband but stay near my children to take care of them. The question of remarrying is out at this point.

Anyway, after all these ups and downs, we are considered a happy family, that is by our culture's standards, since we all work and we sit down together, at least we eat together in one place, which is unusual in other families. We can talk about the children and their futures. After all he doesn't beat me like other men do. He doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke. So he doesn't spend his money just on these things. In that he is good.

In conclusion I would like women in North America and other parts of the world to pray for our country because of the civil war we find ourselves in. And I also want you to pray for my family, so that there is peace in it and harmony, so that we live happily as a Christian family according to Christ's teachings. God bless you. •

Choosing Singleness

"Because I have not married I have had many problems with the church brothers and leaders. They cannot conceive of a single woman. I am like garbage in their eyes. Only God has strengthened me so that I don't fall into any man's arms because the culture demands it."

This testimony from a Nicaraguan woman, a volunteer in Mennonite church work, confirms that cultural barriers to singleness remain formidable in most cultures. Yet increasing numbers of Third World women seem to be at least exploring the option of singleness.

Many do not seem to prefer the single life. Instead, they are attempting to avoid the problems, constraints and injustice they've witnessed in the marriage relationship. I have met several such women in Mexico. While hardly wild-eyed radicals, they are nonetheless socially aware and fairly well-educated.

Rosa, a 30-year-old social worker, is typical. Although she has been dating a young man for about nine months, she's extremely leary of marriage and cynical about the "novio" or boyfriend relationship. "They'll say anything while you're novios. It's almost impossible to know what they really think," she told me. Rosa knows that once married, she's caught. In Mexican society, the husband reigns. Few couples function as a team.

- *Alice Deckert, Bethel College church, North Newton, Kan., is one of eight scientists in the nation to be named a Clare Boothe Luce professor. A graduate of Bethel College and Leland Stanford Junior University, Palo Alto, Calif., Alice joined the faculty in the fall at the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Mass., as assistant professor of chemistry.*
- *Jane Hoover Peifer joined the pastoral team at Community Mennonite church, Harrisonburg, Va. Her primary responsibility is Christian education.*
- *Kathleen Kurtz was licensed by Virginia Conference and is serving Manassas (Va.) Church of the Brethren for one year.*

Interestingly, many women who told their stories for this project appear to measure their marriages' success not by the intimacy and happiness attained but by the problems avoided. "At least he's not an alcoholic, at least he doesn't beat me" was a common refrain. Those who ended up with kind, considerate husbands seem truly surprised, but grateful, for their good fortune.

The following story was handwritten by Celia, a Zambian village woman. She is a friend of former MCCer Barbara Wynne, who encouraged Celia to put down on paper her thoughts on getting married.

Celia Speaks

I am 27 years old and single. I am the third daughter of five children. I go to church every Sunday. My mother and my grandmother are Christians; they both live at the Catholic mission.

My father is not a full Christian. He and my mother was divorced when I was 3. He went to marry another woman; then he left his five children.

My mother started suffering to make us grow. She was a woman who was been making clay pot. So that when she sells, she buys school uniforms and feeding us. I was been watching the way my mother was suffering; it came to mind that I shall never get married because it can happen to me also. That was in 1970.

In 1976 I went to secondary school where I learnt many thing looking to (observing) friends who had their fathers. I completed my school in 1980 then I went to stay with my father's brother in another town where I did my shorthand and typing.

After finishing, that brother to my father forced me to get married to his friend. I refused, so he said, "You pack up and go." (One of the motives may have been that the uncle would have received a dowry from this marriage.—B. Wynne)

So I wrote a letter to my mother to send me transport money so that I can run away from that marriage. I went back to mother's home. I stayed there almost two years fearing that wherever I shall go they shall force me to get married.

Then my brother in 1985 started working. He called me to go and stay with him, and if I can have a chance of

getting employed. I started working as depot buyer for a company that buys and distributes cotton and soybean seed.

This time I am thinking of getting married only that I don't trust our men. So I fear it can also be like what happened to my mother. Yes, I like kids, but keeping kids, it need a big support. ●





by Elke Hubert

Dialogue With Sisters of the World

You, sisters in other parts of the world,
I hear your voices,
I hear them in the distance, not clearly yet, not concretely
yet;
but I want to understand your language,
I want to hear what you have to say.

You, sister in Ethiopia,
I hear you cry because the drought has destroyed harvest
and fields, and hunger and poverty are expanding;

You, sister in Spain,
I hear you sing because your small congregation seeks
new ways to share the love of Jesus with the world.

You, sister in Nicaragua,
I hear you mourn because the hurricane has devastated
your country and has left many people without shelter.
The hands and feet that God uses are not enough to end
the misery;

You, sister in Japan,
I hear you comfort because your neighbor has lost her
husband to progress and to his job, and she often waits
with the children for him to come home.

You, sister in Ethiopia,
hear my crying because a widespread spiritual drought
in my country fails to produce God's harvest, and many
people seek their salvation in materialism and occultism;

You, sister in Spain,
hear my singing because Jesus is faithful and gives us
his richness again and again in the midst of our
congregation in our poverty;

You, sister in Nicaragua,
hear my mourning because through our lifestyles we let
trees, animals and fish die. We exploit the resources of
this earth, and we leave the deadly waste to the coming
generations;

You, sister in Japan,
hear my comforting because my neighbor can't see any
sense in her life, and has become ill. She longs for warmth
and intimacy, yet takes medications that leave her cold
and empty.

You, sisters of the world,
come, we want to share our sufferings with each other,
we want to communicate so that our burdens are shared,
and we can experience that it is easier to walk together
and endure together.

Come, we want to share in each other's joys, so that
they multiply and we can spread them together before
our God in a large, colorful tapestry of thankfulness.

For it is Paul who tells us about a secret of life: Bear
one another's burden, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

You, sisters of the world,
Come, let us together cry, sing, mourn and comfort! Let
us call each other to repentance and encourage one
another! Let us together pray to the one God in Jesus
Christ, and together wait for salvation.

When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion we
were like people who dreamed. Our mouths were filled
with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it
was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great
things for them."

**Elke Hubert is from Ingolstadt, West Germany. Translation by
Hansulrich Gerber, Mennonite World Conference**



Obstacles to Family Planning

This story allows us to glimpse a Third World woman's experiences with birth control. The use of contraceptives, or failure thereof, is a controversial topic worldwide. Researchers do not agree on what the obstacles are or on how to best overcome them.

From her research in six countries in the mid '70's, Perdita Huston concluded that male attitudes were a prime obstacle to the use of birth control. Over a decade later, following the 1985 International Women's Year, a *Christian Science Monitor* journalist travelled to villages and cities and concluded that Huston's contention no longer held, that men had come to accept contraceptive use.

Others have maintained that ignorance, rather than machoism, is a key hindrance to the use and acceptance of birth control. Former MCCer Jim Kurtz, for example, who worked as a nurse in the Philippines, stated that family planning there "could be summed up in one word—ignorance."

Perhaps the reality lies closer to what one poor but perceptive Mexican mother of 10 recently told me. She has so many children, she said, because of her husband's machoism and their combined ignorance.

Both themes run through the accounts we received, as exemplified by these two typical quotes:

"Men that don't have children feel they're not as much of a man as a man who does have children. Yes, it's manhood to have a baby." (Appalachian woman)

"I could never figure out why I had to urinate so often during pregnancy until during my fourth pregnancy someone showed me a drawing of how women are put together inside. I wish I had known these things eight years ago." (28-year-old Bolivian woman)

Of course there are many other obstacles to family planning—delivery systems that are either nonexistent,

inappropriate or downright degrading; religious beliefs and church opposition; government pro-natalist policies; and peer pressure.

Whatever the reasons, results can be tragic. Unloved, uncared-for children roam city streets around the globe. It is impossible to obtain exact figures on the number of street children; one relief agency puts the figure as high as 100 million.

Another outcome of non-use of contraceptives is abortion. Studies have shown that abortion is common in most, if not all societies, regardless of religious or political persuasions. (Viel) In Brazil, illegal abortions number approximately 3 million annually; 25 percent of all hospital beds are filled by women whose illegal abortion attempts have failed. In Egypt, one out of four pregnancies ended in illegal abortion in 1980. In India, a woman dies of septic abortion every 10 minutes. (Morgan)

In some societies, as this story illustrates, women use folk remedies, such as herbs, to provoke abortion. However, they apparently do not think they are causing abortion per se; rather, they are "bringing on a late period." Former MCC nurse Mert Brubaker wrote from Brazil in 1985, "Many women I know would not think of having an abortion but think nothing of using herb teas to induce a long overdue period. Or they will go to the pharmacy to get a shot to induce a period. In these cases there is a complete absence of the idea that they might be aborting a life. If they can induce a period up to the third month then they weren't pregnant, just late."

The following account, recorded by former MCCer Wanda Rohrer-Heyerly, portrays the themes that resound through the stories we collected: Women want to control family size via safe, reliable methods; they desire reasonable economic security, happy and healthy family relationships and responsible husbands.

Marcela Speaks

As a child I lived in the interior of Pernambuco, Brazil. My mother separated from my father when I was 12. He was always fighting and beating so she went to Recife and left all the rest of us there. After a while, she rented a house in Recife and came and got us.

Then my mother started living with another man and he was like a father to us. His name was.... I forget his name. He gave everything to her and we had everything we needed. We had clothes, food, everything. He was really

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Further reading

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good to us, but he never let us leave the house. We couldn't even go to Mass. Once I went to a party nearby. He beat me and told me if I did it again he'd kill me.

He gave us everything we needed but I was afraid of him because he said he'd kill us if we went out. So I didn't go anywhere, not to Mass, not to a movie, nowhere. Then I started dating Paulo. But my mother said that he was too short and wouldn't be able to support a family.

"Can't you see it will never work," she said. I was almost 15. I hadn't even had a period yet, but we dated. I wasn't even thinking about getting married. All the time my step-father said I couldn't go out, just stay at home.

Then Paulo quit his job. He had worked there a year and a half. Six months later we got engaged. When he quit, he took all the money and bought all our furniture—dresser, bed, table, stove, pans, everything. He wanted the best for me.

He said, "Look, Marcela, do you want to marry me? Do you really want to marry me?" And I said, "Yes, I do." So we were going to get married when I got to be 20 or 22, but I was so cooped up at home that we decided to get married sooner.

We registered at the church and had a civil wedding when I was 17 on Dec. 23. So I went through December, January, February and March—four months—and then I felt a pain in my stomach. I couldn't figure out what it was.

So Paulo took me to a doctor. The doctor thought I was younger than I was. I looked young and had long hair. He said, "Come here, so you're married are you?" I said, "This is my husband" and I pointed to Paulo. "You are so young," he said. He examined me and gave me some diarrhea medicine and had me get a blood test, urine sample and stool test. When I did the tests, the results were—baby!

I went crazy when I found out. But I wanted the baby and thought about names for it. I started buying baby things and I was really happy. Paulo was, too. I had bad morning sickness. When nine months was up, I suffered a lot with him. It was like dying. And now here he is, naughty and he drives me nuts.

After Plinio was born I had my first period. Then five days after it started I began taking birth control pills. I took them for a year or so and felt okay. Then I stopped for a while and Myra was born. I started taking the pills again. But I got nauseous, I vomited a lot. I couldn't even look

at the pills. I started getting varicose veins. I still have them today. I had discharge and vaginal infection from the pills. They made me sick and nervous. I would cry over a dirty house. The doctor said the pills made me that way.

The doctor had me quit taking the pill and try rhythm. But it didn't work for me. I didn't count right and Almino was born.

I wanted just two children but Almino was born. I didn't want any more but I didn't have time to go to the doctor and I was afraid to have my tubes tied because they'd have to cut me open. I worked all day and didn't get home 'til five in the afternoon.

We couldn't afford to pay for the tubal ligation ourselves and I didn't have time to stand in lines at the government-paid clinics, so we just didn't have it done. After the third came the fourth and fifth and now Maria, the sixth. Then I had a tubal ligation. It cost 1,500 cruzeiros. If I hadn't had the money I wouldn't have had it done because I didn't have time to wait in line.

When I was pregnant with some of the children I thought about getting an abortion. With the third pregnancy, with Almiro, I took a lot of medicine, for a whole month, to see if my period would come. I used some herbs. But I guess once I'm pregnant, it stays. For the fourth pregnancy I also took a lot. I took it for a month but when I saw it wasn't working, I stopped. I did it for the fifth and sixth pregnancies too, because we couldn't afford another baby. But now when I think about it, I'm glad it didn't work.

Before, I was afraid to have a tubal ligation but the fear disappeared! I have had six children and felt obligated to do it because the doctor said I could have twice as many. With the way prices are now, everything so expensive, I put my fears aside and went and had it done.

When I was pregnant with Maria, I went to the pharmacy to have an injection that causes immediate abortion. The pharmacist asked if I was married. I said yes. He said he could only give it with my husband's permission. He'd have to sign for it.

So I said to Paulo, "I went to get an injection for an abortion (I was only 15 days along) and I brought the papers for you to sign." He said, "No way, I'd never sign to have one of my children killed. The same way I wanted the first five to raise, I want the sixth, too." So I didn't take any more medication, just herbs. But I was afraid. The baby could

be born with a defect.

I agreed with Paulo not to have the injection. Like he said, to have one of my own children killed. Fifteen days isn't much, but it is already life. When it leaves the man, it is already life. And so there's Maria, our beautiful child. When I was close to delivery, I took some herbs but I was afraid she would be born with a defect—blind, crippled. Thank God she is fine and beautiful. I feel awful when I look at her and think of all those things I took. It is like a heavy guilt on top of me and I regret it.



I work to make a little money for school uniforms, etc. Paulo makes so little. We have enough for food. We never have enough to save in the bank. If we put it in the bank, we starve. At the end of the year we get a bonus and with it we buy some new clothes. But during the rest of the year there is only enough for groceries. If I could work, it would be better. But it is hard to find a job. I think about going to the United States to work.

At least we own our house. If we had to pay rent it would be worse. We buy clothes only at the end of each year. Every year on Mother's Day Paulo gives me a gift. This year he didn't because there wasn't enough money. He feels so sad when he can't do it, but I don't care. I know when he has the money he will give me a present.

Paulo is too good. He gives me all his money. He was a good son and is a good husband. He doesn't fight with me. I am the one who starts it. If it were up to him, there wouldn't be any fights. When I fight with him he says, "You should be ashamed. The children are watching and when they grow up, they'll want to do the same thing." ●

Broken Boundaries, a new child sexual abuse packet prepared by the MCC Domestic Violence Task Force, is available from the MCC offices in Winnipeg, Kitchener, and Akron, Pa. *Broken Boundaries* is for those concerned about family life, for friends of people who were sexually abused as children and for sexually abused people themselves. Also available from MCC is

The Purple Packet, a resource on spouse abuse. Copies of the packets are available for \$5 each.

by Rosalee Bender

Whispers of Sacrament

the church is full of women
only a few men appear
Lucia whispers her story, her fear

my mother was beaten
this time for being one hour late
the day the buses went on strike
she had to walk home

she was late
he's 56; she's 38
he fears she has another man
one hour is enough time,
to have another man

body bruised, she gathered a meal
he garbaged it, declaring it unsafe
he left; she wept
i went to her
prepared supper
with the remaining bread
and wished there was wine to serve

Rosalee Bender of Kitchener, Ontario works with MCC in Recife, Brazil in education with the deaf.



by Joe Hertzler

Tragic Beauty

The Blackeyed Susan
golden petals with cone of black
wind, rain and storm
beat down upon your head
and you have scant protection
I nominate you
state flower of battered women
everywhere
symbol of worth and beauty.

Joe Hertzler, with his wife Mary, lives in Elkhart, Ind. In addition to his work in church relations and finances at Goshen Biblical Seminary, he raises flowers and doves.

Finding Fulfillment

We end on a happy note, with a story that demonstrates that marriage can be fulfilling, especially when the woman has some control over the number of offspring she will bear and when the husband is loving.

The story was handwritten by a Botswana woman, friend of former MCCer Jill Hardenbrook.

Rebecca Speaks

I am a girl of 23 years. I am traditionally married with two kids. I fell in love with my husband when I was 17 years, while doing my Cambridge at Moeding College. He was my junior at school; that was in 1981.

We stayed married for two years while he was still attending school. In 1983 we decided to have a child. That's when I had been teaching. We were both happy with the idea.

The baby planned for was born on April 14 at the hospital, being a boy. Our parents were happy with us, only that our church minister did not want youngsters to have children. (She was 18 when the baby was born. She is a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, and both she and her husband attend church services.)

I went on teaching and was supposed to go for training when I found out that I was going to have another child. The news was not a disgrace to my husband; we had to accept it as I had been using the pill but was unfortunate. The baby was born last year and is now 11 months old and is still being breastfed.

On my behalf having children makes me happy. The two kids I have is the number family I wanted. I will try to use any kind of contraceptive to prevent more children. My marriage seems to be a goal because life is simple with one man and all the love and care he gives. ●

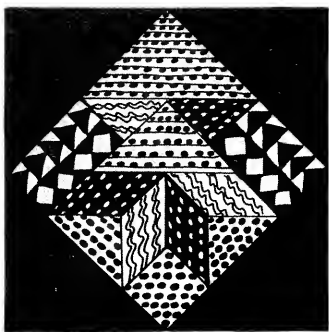


Letters

- Thank you for the issue on women and cancer (No. 85) and to the women who've shared their journeys. I appreciate your courage in including an alternate response by Koop—a naturopathic approach. I believe that we must turn to our sisters in other cultures where breast cancer rates are much lower and learn from them.

Recent studies of Japanese women show that their low incidence of breast cancer changes when they move to the U.S. and adopt our eating habits. A woman surgeon recently predicted that in the next decade we will abandon mastectomies. May we all do our part in eliminating the need for such a traumatic procedure and focus on prevention, not just cures.

—Cathy Passmore, Corvallis, Ore.



Illustrations in this issue were drawn by Teresa Pankratz of Chicago. Please do not reproduce without permission.

News and Verbs

- The 10th Women in Ministry Conference is being planned for March 30, 31 and April 1, 1990 in Fresno, Calif. The featured speaker is Katie Funk Wiebe on the theme, "Women Telling the Story." The weekend program will also include worship, Bible study, workshops, special interest groups and fellowship. Both women and men are invited. For information contact Val Rempel, 4879 East Butler, #103, Fresno, CA 93727. Telephone (209) 251-8628.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT edited by Christine Wenger Nofsinger. Layout by Shirley Stauffer Redekop. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Chris Nofsinger, Editor, MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

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**Forwarding
and address
correction
requested**

- Fifty Brethren and Mennonite lesbian and supportive women recently made history by gathering for a retreat. The highlight of the retreat was the sense of community that grew out of being with lesbians from the same religious tradition. Many women felt that sexuality and spirituality, two integral aspects of their lives, have been polarized. Participants affirmed the need to unite the different pieces of their lives and found that being with other Mennonite and Brethren lesbians was a powerful and meaningful way to make the connection. A common comment throughout the weekend was, "This retreat is like church for me." Plans were made to continue building a support network and to have annual retreats.
- "Women and Leadership: Changing Roles in Church and Society" is a retreat being sponsored by the Brethren in Christ Church at Camp Hebron, Halifax, Pa., March 28-30, 1989. The retreat, the first of its kind for the denomination, marks a significant move toward intentionally helping women who feel called to some kind of ministry or leadership position in the church. Aida Besancon Spencer and her husband, William David Spencer, of Gordon-Conwell Seminary will be the keynote speakers. A variety of workshops will be offered. For more information, contact the Board for Brotherhood Concerns, P.O. Box 246, Mount Joy, PA 17522; (717) 653-8251.
- A National League of Cities survey of 278 mayors and city managers cited a lack of day-care centers as the leading headache for families with young children. The report says that by next year 64 percent of all families, accounting for ten and a half million children under six, will have working mothers.

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